



CRP Special Edition

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Dear Producer,

Whether you have CRP acres which are expiring in September or cropland which includes environmentally sensitive lands, the opportunity to sign-up for a new CRP contract is here.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will conduct a four-week Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general signup, beginning on March 12 and ending on April 6. CRP has a 25-year legacy of successfully protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States.

Currently, about 30 million acres are enrolled in CRP; and contracts on an estimated 6.5 million acres will expire on Sept. 30, 2012.

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data for each of the EBI factors based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all other offers and selections made from that ranking. FSA uses the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage;
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching;
- On-farm benefits from reduced erosion;
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period;
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion; and
- Cost.

Over the past 25 years, farmers, ranchers, conservationists, hunters, fishermen and other outdoor enthusiasts have made CRP the largest and one of the most important in USDA's conservation portfolio. CRP continues to make major contributions to national efforts to improve water and air quality, prevent soil erosion by protecting the most sensitive areas including those prone to flash flooding and runoff. At the same time, CRP has helped increase populations of pheasants, quail, ducks, and rare species, like the sage grouse, the lesser prairie chicken, and others. Highlights of CRP include:

- CRP has restored more than two million acres of wetlands and two million acres of riparian buffers;
- Each year, CRP keeps more than 600 million pounds of nitrogen and more than 100 million pounds of phosphorous from flowing into our nation's streams, rivers, and lakes.
- CRP provides \$1.8 billion annually to landowners—dollars that make their way into local economies, supporting small businesses and creating jobs; and
- CRP is the largest private lands carbon sequestration program in the country. By placing vulnerable cropland into conservation, CRP sequesters carbon in plants and soil, and reduces both fuel and fertilizer usage. In 2010, CRP resulted in carbon sequestration equal to taking almost 10 million cars off the road.

The information in this newsletter may give you some ideas on how to apply CRP on your farm to increase profits, filter runoff into streams, restore wildlife habitat or protect the most erodible portions of your farm.

What Should You Do with Your Expiring CRP Acres?

CRP signup is upon us and it's decision time! With current grain prices, many of you may be contemplating whether or not to re-enroll your CRP acres. The following options are presented below to help you make an educated decision on the future of your CRP.

Option One: Re-enroll

Consider re-enrolling your CRP contract. Don't worry if your current CRP soil rental rate payment is too low. There's a good chance the rental rate has improved since the last time you signed the CRP contract. Over the last five years FSA has adjusted CRP soil rental rates. Check with your local USDA Service Center to see what the new soil rental rates are. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Consider converting your CRP field to a wildlife-friendly mix. Back in the 1990's, most warm-season CRP fields were planted to a mix of "giant" native grasses and a pinch of wildflowers. Back then, we thought more was better; so many grass seeding rates were around 8 to 12 pounds per acre. We've learned a lot over the last 10 to 15 years about establishing native grasses! Research has shown we can have good habitat and reduce soil erosion with much lower seeding rates (around 3 to 5 pounds of grass along with 3 pounds of native wildflowers per acre). Better seeding mixes are good for the landowner and good for wildlife.

Instead of re-enrolling the current grass cover – whether it is warm-season or cool-season, consider replanting the field to a quail-friendly mix of little bluestem, wildflowers and legumes. Old CRP fields will need 2 to 3 herbicide applications to effectively remove the existing cover. Don't skimp on herbicide either. You'll pay for it in the long run with re-invading fescue or brome. During the current CRP sign up consult with your local wildlife biologist or Private Land Conservationist for recommended seeding mixes and conversion techniques. Converting to a quail-friendly mix is also likely to improve your overall CRP score.

Consider converting 10% of your existing CRP into pollinator habitat blocks. Pollinators like honeybees and native insects are experiencing significant population declines due to loss of habitat, loss of floral diversity, invasive plants, disease and parasites.

Both honey bees and native bees are important to agriculture:

- The value of honeybee pollination to U. S. agriculture is estimated at \$18.9 billion per year.
- 75% of the flowering plants in the world rely on pollinators for reproduction.
- 35% of the crop production in the world is dependent upon pollinators.

Pollinator plots are great for butterflies, bees, and numerous wildlife species. Establish these plots in block or long narrow bands adjacent to shrubby cover. These plots will provide outstanding deer browse, plus great bugging areas for grassland birds throughout the spring, summer, and fall. Providing pollinator habitat will also improve your overall CRP score.

Option Two: Take Advantage of Continuous CRP

Landowners converting their expiring CRP fields into soybean and corn fields or pasture should consider leaving field borders along the field edges and wide buffers next to streams and ponds. Landowners can enroll these sensitive areas into popular Continuous CRP practices such as CP21 Filter Strip, CP22 Riparian Forest Buffer and CP33 Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds. Landowners will still receive an annual soil rental payment and incentives for enrolling the margins of their fields into the Continuous CRP. In some cases the payment is higher because of sign up incentives. If necessary, they can even receive up to 90% cost share for establishing the proper vegetation.

Maintaining buffers around the edges of crop fields, not only provides great habitat for quail and other grassland birds, but also takes marginally productive ground out of production. With high input costs and low yields it makes sense to keep field edges and buffers in CRP. In 2008, the University of Missouri Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute found that corn prices need to be over \$6 for ten years in order to out-perform profit gains from CP33. Since that study CRP rental rates have been raised several times and many cropfield inputs have increased. Remember to Farm the Best, Buffer the Rest!

Option Three: Production with Wildlife in Mind

Some expired CRP fields may remain in grass for hay or pasture. Landowners can still take advantage of Continuous CRP practices if they plan on haying or grazing the field; however livestock will need to be excluded from the CRP buffer.

If you plan to return your CRP field to corn or beans, consider only farming the ridge-tops or flattest portions of the field. Keep the steeper slopes in CRP. These steep slopes were put in CRP for a reason and breaking them out of CRP may cause erosion problems. Plus, a mix of CRP and row-crop equals outstanding habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

New Continuous CRP Initiatives!

On March 2, 2012, Secretary Vilsack announced the opportunity for producers to enroll 1 million acres of land in new Continuous CRP Initiatives to preserve grasslands, wetlands and wildlife. These continuous practices will include annual rental payments, cost share for establishment and management, and possible sign-up incentives. Look for these new opportunities in the coming months:

- **Increase in Sign-up Incentive Payments (SIPs) to \$150/acre.**
- **New Continuous Pollinator Practice.**
- **Additional State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) acres to focus on creating bob-white quail and prairie chicken habitat.**
- **Additional CP33 (Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds) acres—Plant unproductive cropland edges into wildlife-friendly grasses and wildflowers.**
- **Continuous CRP Sign-up for Highly Erodible Cropland with an Erodibility Index of 20 or greater.**

CRP Information Meetings

In response to the recent announcement for General CRP Sign-up 43, landowner workshops will be held the month of March to inform producers and conservationists about their CRP options. Attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions and learn from biologists on how to improve the chances of their lands being accepted into the CRP program. **For the complete list of CRP Workshops, go to the MDC More Quail Blog at <http://mdc.mo.gov/blogs/more-quail>.**

March 15th—6:00 p.m. @ MU Bradford Research and Extension Center, Columbia, Mo. For questions, please contact Jason Sykes at (573) 769-3512 ext. 6.

March 16th—1:00 p.m. @ USDA Service Center, 18450 Ridgeview Lane, Dexter, Mo. For questions, please contact Brandon Wirsig at (573) 624-5939 ext. 136.

March 16th—1:00 p.m. @ the Memphis Fire Station, 104 N. Washington, Memphis, Mo. For questions, please contact Craig Williamson at (660) 216-1588 ext. 111.

March 20th—6:00 p.m. @ Carrollton Public Library, 1 N. Folger St., Carrollton, Mo. For questions, please contact Andrew White with Quail Forever at (660) 619-1719.

March 22nd—6:00 p.m. @ Litton Center, Highway 190, Chillicothe, Mo. For questions, please contact Andrew White with Quail Forever at (660) 619-1719.

March 27th—6:00 p.m. @ Litton Center, Highway 190, Chillicothe, Mo. For questions, please contact Andrew White with Quail Forever at (660) 619-1719.

March 29th—6:00 p.m. @ Linn County Career & Technical Center, 122 Pershing Rd., Brookfield, Mo. For questions, please contact Andrew White with Quail Forever at (660) 619-1719.

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Farm Service Agency's
**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
General Sign Up 43**

Now through April 6, 2012

Contact your local Farm Service Agency County Office today for
more information & to set an appointment!

See inside for upcoming producer meeting dates.

For more information on CRP, visit:

www.fsa.usda.gov/crp



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